

## Center for the Homeless

813 South Michigan Street  
South Bend, Indiana 46601

### Program Overview

The Center for the Homeless in South Bend, Indiana provides a wide array of services to help homeless individuals and families recover their lives and move towards self-sufficiency. The idea that people need a holistic recovery, whether their homelessness is the result of substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, or any other reason, permeates not only the Center's overall mission—which is to “help people break the cycle of homelessness; bring together disparate groups so that each can discover the worth, dignity, and God-given potential of the other; and pioneer a service model worthy of replication”—but applies specifically to their employment services as well. According to Lou Nanni, former Executive Director of the Center,

*. . . There's absolutely no question that work is essential to an individual's self-worth. Meaningful engagement in the workplace, being productive citizens is critical, to the way that we think about ourselves, and quite frankly, the way that others think about us as well. Just like anything it can be taken to its logical extreme. Many of us. . . when we go out socially, the first thing we ask people as we're meeting them is, 'So what do you do?' And we begin to, on the one extreme, equate a person's value with their work. The logical extreme of that is that if somebody is not doing anything, they are nobody. And the worst thing that we ever see down here is when people actually believe that about themselves. They believe, 'Since I'm not doing anything, I'm not working, I am nobody. I'm a loser, I'm a failure. . . .' It's devastating to the self-esteem. So work is a critical piece of the puzzle.*

At the Center, employment services are not about a resident simply finding a job. Rather, they are about helping people develop the skills to both find and keep a job, which plays an

important role both in the recovery process and in building towards self-sufficiency over the long-term.

## **Guest Demographics**

The guests at the Center for the Homeless make up a fairly diverse population, based on 1998 data. The Center can currently house 80 single men, 22 single women, and 15 families at a time; an average of 142 people are housed there each night. For the most part, guests at the Center are fairly well-educated: only about 34 percent of the guests do not have a high school diploma or GED; the remaining guests have either a high school diploma or GED (45 percent) or have some college or a college degree (21 percent). Racially, 49 percent of the guests are Caucasian, 45 percent are African American, 5 percent are Hispanic, and 1 percent are multi-racial. Just over half (55 percent) of the residents are between the ages of 19 and 40 years old; 26 percent are between 41 and 59 years; 17 percent are aged 17 or younger, and 2 percent are 60 years or older. In 1998, 74 adults completed the Center's employment services program, and 85 percent of them found jobs which paid well over the minimum wage.

## **Staffing**

The Center has a fairly unique staffing structure. While it has 29 full-time (and nine part-time) staff, whose responsibilities range from the administrative to the running of programs and overall operations, many of the Center's day-to-day activities are run by either guests of the Center or volunteers. Guests are expected, among other things, to keep their rooms or dorms clean, and help out around the Center with specific chores and on an as-needed basis (i.e., helping unload clothing from a donor's car). The Center estimates that between 400 and 600 volunteers help out at the Center each month.

## **The Center for the Homeless Model**

The Center's model for serving the homeless may be broken down into six phases, all of which have the goals of recovery and self-sufficiency in mind.

In the first phase, guests are provided with emergency shelter, when they first come into the Center. Within the first few days, a guest is provided with an orientation to the Center, including what services are offered and what will be expected of them (i.e., participation in programs and following rules). Guests may also receive crisis intervention and be assessed by staff to see what their needs are. Primary treatment referrals to on-site medical, mental health, and/or substance abuse treatment, case management, and/or relationship counseling are made as necessary.

The second phase of care involves personal development and education, in the form of the Center's five-week Starting Over/Stepping Higher (SOSH) seminar. In SOSH, guests of the Center focus on self-esteem issues and soft skills, such as forgiveness, healthy relationships, goal-setting, stress management, communication styles, team leadership, and employment economics and employer expectations—issues that contribute both to recovery and job retention. Once a guest has successfully completed SOSH—which includes a graduation ceremony at the Center's Monday night community meetings—s/he may begin the job training and placement phase, composed of the five-week BRAVO! seminar. This seminar focuses on both hard and soft skills, including skills assessment, handling job-related stress, interviewing and resume writing, and in-house job training. There is a community-wide graduation ceremony for BRAVO! graduates upon completion of the program and at the Monday night meetings as well. Staff have found that conducting program graduation ceremonies at the weekly community meetings encourages newcomers at the Center to stay and participate in the services offered.

The follow-up to the BRAVO! seminar is the fourth phase, where guests focus specifically on job retention and budgeting. This phase includes a job club, budgeting and consumer credit counseling, mentorship program with job placement, and quarter-way housing placement. From this point, guests who have successfully found and maintained employment may move to supportive (that is, financially supported) housing, which staff may help them find and finance; guests at this phase also begin volunteering either in the community or as mentors to other guests, and may participate in an evening support group.

Once a guest has successfully maintained employment for one year, s/he may begin the process of becoming a homeowner—the sixth phase. Staff work with residents to help them find a stable neighborhood and low mortgage payments. The resident may still be volunteering in the community or at the Center, and receiving case management services.

Not all residents make it through all six phases. Even so, the Center provides the opportunity for each guest to overcome the obstacles in their lives by growing mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, strengthening the skills and attributes which will help empower them to lead a better, more productive life.

### **Other Services at the Center**

Through partnerships, the Center is able to provide its guests with many on-site services, which contribute both to guests' well-being and their ability to maintain employment. These services include:

- ! The Play, Exploration, and Development Support (PEDS) program for children up to the age of three—this service, which frees working parents at the Center from the need to find day care, is provided in conjunction with Memorial Hospital in South Bend. An occupational therapist and occupational therapy students are on staff and work with at-risk children with the goal of preventing developmental delay;
- ! A preschool class, run by the Montessori Academy at Edison Lakes, for children ages three through six;
- ! A medical clinic staffed through Memorial Hospital;
- ! The Madison Center and Hospital-supported Community Support program, serving the chronically mentally ill, and the New Passages program, serving the chemically dependent;
- ! AIDS Ministries/AIDS Assist, which offers on-site educational, testing, and counseling services once a week;
- ! Counseling and veterans services provided by the Veterans Administration once a month;
- ! Access to government benefits through bi-weekly visits from the Social Security Administration;
- ! The Turning Point program, offering individual, family, and group therapy, as well as psychoeducation, through the Genesis Program;
- ! Meal service, staffed primarily by volunteers and guests of the Center, provided in a dining-hall setting;
- ! An adult education and computer center; and
- ! A chapel with religious services and meetings offered by several different organizations.

One guest describes the Center as:

*...like having a healthy relationship with Mom and Dad again. . .someone that pays the bills, while I save my money. Someone that helps me get. . .just the basic stuff like soap and shampoo and toilet tissue. . .and food. Washing dishes, just things that in a . . .normal, everyday life that you have to do, that. . .takes so much of your time, that you forget about the other things in your life that you need to take care of, and when I came here, I felt like, now I have a Mom and Dad. Now I live at home again, you know? Now I can take care of my GED. Now I can take care of college. Now I can take care of me.*

## **The Importance of Partnerships**

The Center's vision is similar to their mission: "Take the best resources the community has to offer and make them inclusive of our neediest citizens." The key to fulfilling both may be described in former Executive Director Lou Nanni's words as,

*...Partnerships, partnerships, partnerships. We know, perhaps, the single most important component to the success that we've experienced here at the Center for the Homeless, is in the recognition of our own limitations. . . .So we need to partner with those organizations in the community [who are the best at what they do].*

Mr. Nanni elaborates on the partnership theme, indicating five levels of partnerships are needed:

- ! Institutional partnerships;
- ! Development partnerships;
- ! Operations partnerships;
- ! Program partnerships; and
- ! Guest/client partnerships.

Below, these partnerships are described in more detail, along with advice from the Center in developing them.

### **Institutional Partnerships**

Institutional partners are those which are represented on the Center's board of directors. As board members, these representatives leverage support for the Center in the community. The Center recommends several criteria in selecting institutional partners. The organizations should:

- ! Have reputations which lend credibility to your organization;
- ! Have widespread support from the top level of their organization and throughout;
- ! Be able to power-broker in the community, and be able and willing to leverage partnerships at all levels;
- ! Provide a long-term commitment to develop and sustain your organization; and
- ! Have senior management represented on your board of directors.

### **Development Partnerships**

Development partners may be described as both as financial partners and as community partners. In one sense, these partnerships help fund the Center and the services it provides; the Center seeks to match every public dollar with four private dollars, so that the community can take ownership of the Center's work. But this cannot be done without cultivating personal relationships with key people involved in schools, civic groups, religious organizations, businesses, and local government, and as private citizens (i.e., volunteers and cash donors). In this sense, development (or financial support) and community relations are different sides of the same coin.

The Center recommends evaluating potential development partners in terms of whether they have progressive leadership and a strong community reputation, can provide long-term profitability, and have a demonstrated charitable interest in working with you.

### **Operations Partnerships**

Operations partnerships are those developed with organizations that provide in-kind, rather than cash contributions to your organization. In-kind services may include food and clothing donations, as well as free services, such as sanitation (free trash pick-up) or linen service. The Center suggests that these types of partnerships can reduce an organization's outflow of cash, as well as staff time in an operational area; connect community businesses with local volunteers; and provide training opportunities for both guests and clients. A word of warning, though: be careful not to create more work for your staff in developing these kinds of partnerships.

### **Program Partnerships**

Program partnerships may also be defined as service-related partnerships. These partners can provide direct services for your residents, such as health care or day care. For developing these kinds of partnerships, the Center for the Homeless recommends organizations who have a commitment to social service networking, and whose missions overlap yours. The Center also recommends that these organizations be community leaders in their selected service area, and have progressive executive leadership. Finally, the Center suggests that it is best to partner with service organizations that are financially self-sufficient.

### **Guest/Client Partnerships**

Guest/client partnerships are those developed between your organization and residents, particularly with the goal of developing leadership among current guests and building community in the process. The Center stresses that this is the most important partnership they have, and that it is founded on the principles of servant leadership, communication, and connection. It allows the guests to take ownership by participating in program development; trusting and investing in a system shaped by their peers; and supervising and executing internal chores. Center staff believe that through participation in Center governance guests will: shape their own destiny; see personal goals reached in concert with organizational goals; and assist new guests in transitioning beyond homelessness.

### **Initiating Partnerships**

The Center for the Homeless offers a number of suggestions for initiating partnerships with other organizations. Lou Nanni offers,

*How do you initiate partnerships? The greatest vehicle that you have at your disposal is . . . your mission and vision. If it is a mission and a vision which captures the imagination of the public, people are going to be likely to rally around it. What is it that sets you apart? What is it that distinguishes you in that mission and vision? Is it something that people can believe in? Does it make sense to them? And is it something that is bold?*

Once you have inspired others to work with you and educated them about your organization, you can begin to build a relationship with those organizations or individuals. The Center suggests that you assess the highest potential level to give, have the person “most difficult to say no to” do the asking, and later invite those organizations to become involved in other ways. Mr. Nanni explains:

*. . . When you're going to ask somebody to be involved, it is important that you do your research, formally and informally. . . However you're going to ask them to be involved, you want to get as much out of them as you possibly can. You don't want to ask for too low, too little, in another sense. When we go and ask for support the worst thing, the worst answer you can get is an outright 'no.' The second worst answer that you can get is an outright 'yes.' Because as soon as I get an outright 'yes' I'm thinking, 'Oh, I didn't ask for enough. They would have been willing to give more.' So you want to make sure on those levels that you're pushing for more. . . . Second, . . . have the most . . . difficult person to say 'no' [to] do the asking. I'd say my first five or six years at the Center for the Homeless, I never asked anybody for anything. All I did was sing the song. I'd sing the song as best as I could about what the mission and vision of the Center for the Homeless was. But I always had somebody with me, who was already a supporter of the Center for the Homeless, asking the other person at the table, if they'd come on board as well. And many cases it might've been a representative from the University of Notre Dame who was asking, the head of the construction company, that was doing \$30 million of construction on campus at Notre Dame, 'Hey we're on board, we'd like you to come on board.' Very difficult for that person to say 'no' to the Notre Dame administrator. And then where were we, three weeks later? We were with the construction leader, asking some of his subcontractors, to come on board. . . .*

## **Sustaining Partnerships**

Once a partnership is established with your organization, you will want to make sure that commitment is sustained. The Center for the Homeless suggests that a successful partnership continues as long as:

- ! It begins small and grows gradually;
- ! The mutual need remains strong;
- ! Common objectives outweigh conflicts;
- ! Trust is maintained by working relationships;
- ! People at the interface believe in partnership;
- ! The partnership is championed at higher levels;
- ! Oversight is integrated and lines of communication are clear;
- ! Extensive formal and informal dialogue takes place between partners at all levels;
- ! You know your partner's objectives and help them achieve their goals.

### **Multiple Partnership Collaborations**

As your organization develops more partnerships with other organizations, it is likely that some overlap and further collaboration among them will develop for your agency's benefit. The Center for the Homeless shares the following lessons they have learned in multiple partnership collaborations:

- ! Take responsibility for expressing your organization's position fully;
- ! Listen attentively to all other team members, asking for clarification if things are unclear;
- ! Whether you agree with the decision or not, be sure that it does not compromise your values or your organization's mission; and
- ! The only acceptable statements of accord by team members are either: "I agree with the decision," or "I don't completely agree with it, but will fully support it."

The Center also emphasizes:

- ! Multiple partnership collaboration does not mean that everyone agrees that the best possible solution has been reached, but it does mean everyone can support the decision; and
- ! Be attentive foremost to the process so that the above-mentioned guidelines are practiced regularly.

### **Employment Partnerships at the Center**



As mentioned earlier, guests are prepared to take the BRAVO! seminar following graduation from the Starting Over/Stepping Higher seminar. The idea is that guests need the ability and means to stabilize and begin the recovery process, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, before they can focus on future plans, such as employment and self-sufficiency. As Katherine Dick, the SOSH facilitator, explains:

*. . . Our experience has been that people will come in for the short-term stay, and they'll get their job, and they'll get their food, and they'll get their clothes, and they'll go back out. But they haven't changed the core problem. They haven't really addressed what's really going on inside of them. So they go back out, and they replicate their own abuse. Their own self-abuse. They're back six months later. Or a year later, or even 18 months later, having really made no progress. So the question is not whether or not they can get a job, the question is can they keep a job? And can they select a job that really resonates with who they are?*

The BRAVO! seminar picks up where SOSH leaves off, building on the skills guests have developed, channeling them towards employment-related issues, and empowering them to find and maintain employment.

One of the primary topics of BRAVO! is goal setting. What does a guest want to do? What skills are necessary for that? Does the guest have some of those skills already? What will it take for those skills to be built? Once a guest has a particular employment goal in mind, s/he will then need the hard, practical skills to get there.

In the midst of figuring out what they want to do, guests learn hard skills, such as how to look for a job, write a resume, and be successfully interviewed. One structured assignment is for guests to go to different places they might like to work, and ask for, fill out, and submit to the potential employer an application. One guest, Taunja—whose experience with this assignment is atypical—describes this as how she got her current job as a teacher's assistant:

*. . . The way I got the job was, we were in the job training class. It was an assignment to go out and get an application. The school corporation was right down the street and I thought, 'Oh, that will be an easy assignment, just go get the application, fill it out and turn it in. . . .' That was the easiest assignment of all. And, so I did it. And then I came back and I called. My case worker said, 'Well, here I got a list of all the schools; you can call them, and see. . . where they have openings. . . And so I started calling, and like the fourth school. . . the principal asked me, 'Do you want to come in, and would you like to come in for an interview today?' And I was like, 'Sure.' And he said, 'Well, OK, I'll see you at one o'clock.' So I went in there at one o'clock, and he hired me. I wasn't even*

*through with my class yet. So I still had another week and a half. So he said. . .I could come in there and observe and see if that was something I'd like to do, and get a feel of it. And so by the time BRAVO! was over, I started my first day. . .I went to work. . . .*

Upon completing the BRAVO! Seminar, clients move on to the next step in the process. Judy Spigle, a BRAVO! facilitator, describes what happens:

*After BRAVO! they go. . .directly into job search with our employment specialist. And, with the employment specialist and their case manager at the Center for the Homeless, they collaboratively come up with an individual placement plan, an IPP. That includes how much time they'll be spending in job search, how much time they'll be spending in continuing to work maybe toward their GED, or working on adult basic education needs, counseling, 12-step meetings—whatever programming seems appropriate for that particular client..*

Part of this next phase includes looking into jobs developed through partnerships. With institutional, development, operations, and program partnerships with several organizations—including the University of Notre Dame, South Bend's largest employer—the Center already has an advantage in placing guests in open positions with organizations they know are committed to helping people. Father Edward Malloy, President of Notre Dame, explains:

*One of the things that we try to do is be a reliable and steady employer. So, if people start in a relatively rudimentary job, they can work their way up. One of the things that I think we can offer is a kind of environment which stresses community and a sense of mutual responsibility. And that's something that I think also reinforces what the Center for the Homeless is trying to achieve with its guests. . . .We don't hire people that can't do the job, but we have a wide range of jobs that are available, and there's always a turn over. And so, in a typical year, we would be able to hire some guests from the Center . . .We're very clear when we hire someone what our expectations are for performance—regularity, showing up, getting the job done, working well with one's fellow employees. And once a record has been established, it's golden. And we have found that, even when people come from somewhat problematic backgrounds, given the effort and given the right kind of support structures, a good percentage of people can make it here. And that's a lesson that we have to offer to other employers in the area. So, we've taken some risks; occasionally it doesn't work out. But we can say from our experience, that in the majority of, instances, it does work.*

Employment specialists who work at the Center and have their own contacts, seek to extend the number and kinds of potential employers for guests. Joan Evans, one such employment specialist describes her work:

*I . . . work with area employers in the community, going to them, stating that we have people that have come through maybe 10, maybe 12 or 15 weeks of programming, and we certainly want to put that client in a good job with an employer that will be understanding and have compassion. . . . So after. . . they've got their job, I do a job retention and follow along; 30 days I keep monitoring them, 60 days, 90 days, 120 days, 180 days, and even if they have left the Center for the Homeless, I can continue to reach them out in the community if they've gone into housing or their own apartment. Just so that they know that they're not out there alone, there is still a connectedness that if something should happen, and they were in the position of maybe losing a job, that. . . I could do some intervention for them and for the employers.*

One of the partners who employs guests from the Center is Corporate Staffing Resources (CSR), a staffing agency which places both temporary and permanent staff in positions at other companies. Sharon Keane, Vice President of CSR, explains their role at the Center, which includes working with the BRAVO! seminar:

*. . . We've come into the classroom and actually worked with the guests, instructing them on what employers are looking for in the area: on how to interview, how to prepare for work, the level of commitment that an individual needs to bring to a job. And. . . when they are job-ready, . . . having them go through an interview and evaluation process with us, and placing them in a position—typically in what we refer to as a temporary-to-direct hire—which would be a longer-term job opportunity for them.*

Ms. Keane elaborates on how this helps her business:

*. . . Individuals that are coming through the doors here at the Center are very similar to the individuals who are coming through our branch operations. So we work very closely with the Center, because it is the right thing to do. . . . Our clients are looking for individuals who are prepared to work, bottom line. Where those individuals come from, where they've been is not as relevant to our clients. They're looking for the individual who's going to show up for work every day, put their best foot forward, and earn their paycheck on a weekly basis. So, the Center for us has been a source of labor. People who are ready to go to work. And that's a real benefit to us, and to our clients. . . . It's worked very well.*

Ms. Keane further explains how organizations similar to hers can benefit agencies similar to the Center for the Homeless and their guests:

*A fairly common problem for. . .shelters occurs when individuals/organizations, on an informal basis, come by to the. . .shelter looking for labor. Spot jobs, they're often called. And individuals are taken advantage of in those situations, often unpaid or not paid as they were promised in terms of the amount or in the time frame. A staffing service such as CSR can be a buffer. . . .Just as we evaluate our candidates and our employees, we evaluate the clients. We want to make sure that the work environments are safe for our employees; we want to make sure that our clients can pay the invoice when it comes. So, that evaluation goes on before we send any one of our employees from a center or anywhere else to a client site. Obviously, the advantage to the guest at the Center is that they know that they're going to a real job opportunity and that they will be paid. The advantage to the client is that they know that our candidates, whether they're from the shelter or Center, have been thoroughly screened.*

Another partnership that has resulted in job opportunities for guests is the development of CFH Landscaping Services. This job training enterprise—started (in addition to providing job training and employment opportunities) to provide structure to contribute to homeless persons' own development and business development within the community, as well as to create revenue to support the Center's general operations—was developed in partnership with ServiceMaster, who has provided two managers (their services are currently paid for by funds from Memorial Hospital and the business run by the Center) for training the landscape crew. The crew team itself is made up of and led by both current and former guests of the Center. After beginning the job training enterprise, CFH Landscaping Services submitted a proposal to Memorial Hospital to provide commercial landscape maintenance on the hospital's campus. According to Phil Newbold, president and CEO of Memorial Health System (Memorial Hospital):

*When we began looking at the Center for the Homeless landscaping business as an opportunity for Memorial, we took a very hard look, just like we would any particular customer/supplier relationship. They performed in the bidding process in a very professional way. They talked about the outcomes. They talked about what they could do. They talked about the kinds of enthusiasm and excitement that the people would bring, and they sharpened their pencils and made sure that it was competitive as it possibly could be. So they won their contracts, this year, last year, and hopefully every year because they're good at what they do, they're committed to what they do, and they did it in a very business-like, very professional way. . .*

Once this business relationship between the Center and Memorial was established, Memorial began to become more involved with the Center, as part of its own mission in providing primary health care to the community: they opened and staff a health clinic at the Center.

### **What is Success?**

At the Center for the Homeless, success is viewed in terms of what individual guests accomplish. Staff recognize that guests come from many different backgrounds with varying degrees of need. With this in mind, staff see that what may be a simple milestone for one guest may be a truly great accomplishment for another, giving the latter what Lou Nanni describes as “this little triumph of the spirit, that just re-instills this hope.” Even so, Mr. Nanni insists:

*. . . We continue to see at the Center for the Homeless, and let this be said very loudly. . . we continue to see a hell of a lot more failure down here everyday than we do success. The worst thing that we can let happen with our model is be portrayed as a panacea to this problem. It is important to say that time and time again, because we know. . . we need to be doubling and re-doubling our efforts on a regular basis, if we're going to make a dent in this problem.*

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